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PUZZLES AND ENIGMAS

CIA Retirement Bill Baffles Rules Group

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Often a bit mysterious itself, the House Rules Committee was baffled today by an inscrutable Central Intelligence Agency bill.

The deceptively simple measure dealt with retirement pay for CIA employees who engage in hazardous cloak and dagger duty—except that it didn't explicitly say so. Finding still other puzzles and enigmas, the committee "reserved action" until the lid is lifted a bit more.

The committee started looking into the matter at an open hearing yesterday because the Armed Services Committee requested that the bill be cleared for House consideration next week.

As explained by Representative Rivers, Democrat of South Carolina, the bill would establish a revised retirement and

disability benefit system for "certain employees" of the CIA.

Speaking for the Armed Services Committee, he admitted he was in the dark about a lot of things about the CIA. He said he understood that the "certain employees" were in hazardous duty and constituted about 30 per cent of the agency's personnel.

Chairman Smith, Democrat of Virginia, tried in vain to determine why the words "hazardous duty" were not defined or even mentioned in the bill.

He and several colleagues also wondered whether any clear and present danger justified apparently absolute authority for the CIA director to assign employees to such duty or retire them for undisclosed reasons and without recourse.

Representative Allen Smith, Republican of California, a for-

mer FBI agent, said the proposed legislation might let the CIA director make his own definition of "hazardous" and also give him blanket power to fire practically anybody.

Mr. Rivers urged approval of the bill so that CIA hazardous duty employees could receive essentially the same liberal retirement and disability payments that have applied for years to some classifications of FBI and Foreign Service employees. One provision would permit retirement with annuity benefits at age 50 after 20 years service.

Mr. Rivers said the number of CIA employees was "classified." Thus, he said, he was unable to estimate 30 per cent of that unknown factor. But he promised to find out.

Colleagues told Mr. Rivers he must have made a particularly persuasive presentation to win the Armed Services Committee's unanimous approval of the bill September 24.

"But as far as my presentation to the Rules Committee is concerned," Mr. Rivers sighed, "about all I have left is my honesty."